

MEEKER MEMORIES

SPRING 2025

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER

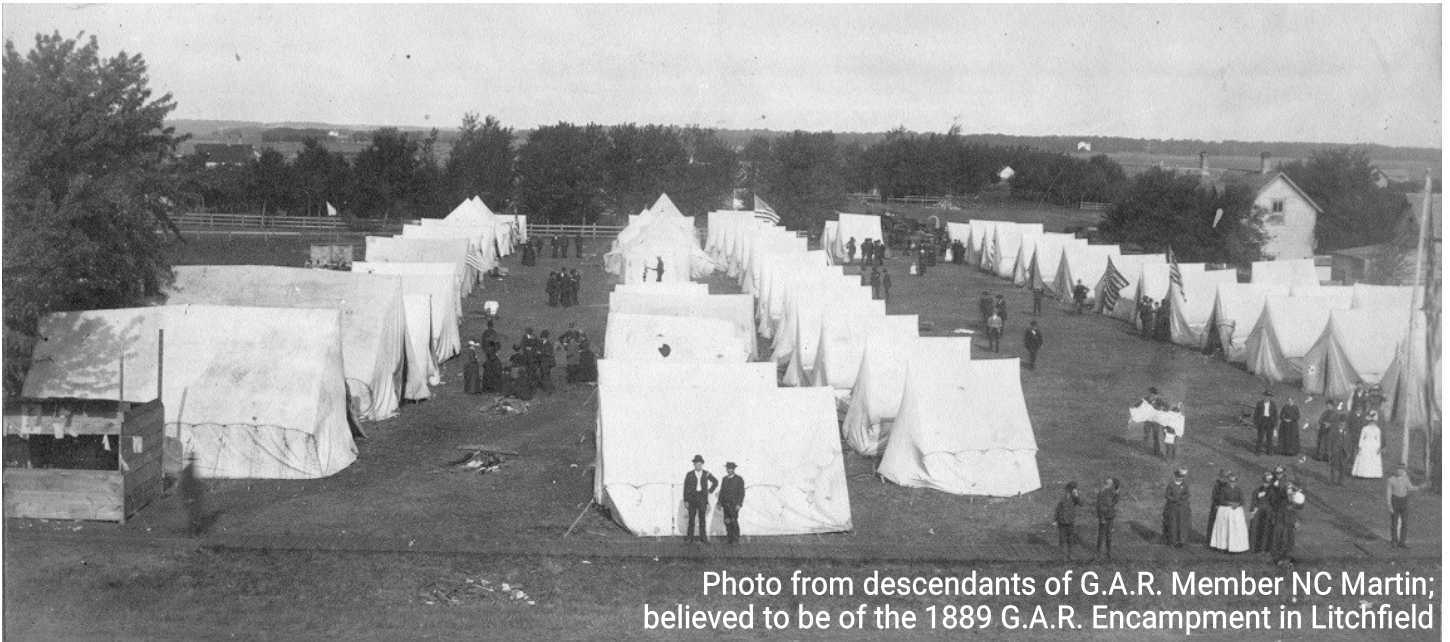


Photo from descendants of G.A.R. Member NC Martin;
believed to be of the 1889 G.A.R. Encampment in Litchfield



**Meeker County Museum
at the G.A.R. Hall**

Sharing Our Stories Since 1885

308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355
320-693-8911

www.meekercomuseum.org

Tuesday-Friday 10:00-4:00
Saturday 12:00-4:00
Closed major holidays

WITHIN THESE PAGES

- 02* *UPCOMING
EVENTS*
- 03* *DIRECTOR'S
NOTES*
- 03* *COLLECTION
SPOTLIGHT*
- 04* *MEMBERS &
DONORS*
- 05* *"UNABLE TO
FLY TO THEM"*



Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall

308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355

Admission

Adults - \$3

Members & Children Under 12 - FREE

Free admission to view the G.A.R. Hall

Board of Directors

Jessica Bondhus

Mark Cashman

Jesse Fuchs

David Holle

Keith Johnson, President

Connie Lies

Theresa Nelson

Chuck Pease

Dave Pease

Lois Sosenheimer

Dean Urdahl

Jessica VanLanduyt

Staff

Danelle Erickson - Executive Director
director@meekercomuseum.org

Sandy Johnson - Research Librarian
staff@meekercomuseum.org

April

- 3 **Genealogy Hour**, 5:30. An informal, monthly gathering for genealogists and family researchers. Free.

Civil War Roundtable—No April meeting

Instead, join us at the Minnesota Civil War Symposium in Bloomington on April 12. TCCWRT.com

- 26 **Civil War Tour of the Minnesota State Capitol**. \$15. See page 7 for details.

May

- 1 **Genealogy Hour**, 5:30. Free.
- 8 **Civil War Roundtable—Battle and Generals: the Civil War according to E. P. Alexander** presented by Andy Ditlevson 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission
- 26 **Memorial Day Picnic**, in support of the Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall. Opera House, 11:00-1:30

June

- 12 **Civil War Roundtable—Salt: A Wartime Commodity or Battle Fodder?** presented by Gary Blessman. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission

Thank you to our local media outlets for supporting local history.

KLFD's Newsmaker—first Thursday
Litchfield Rail articles—2nd and 4th issues each month

Director's Notes

Danelle Erickson Executive Director



March was Women's History Month and at the G.A.R. Hall we added short biographies and photos of the wives of some of our G.A.R. Members. (We will be leaving these bios up until mid-April.) Upon seeing a post on Facebook, we had a few G.A.R. descendants reach out to us. This is one of the best parts of social media—helping people connect to their Meeker County roots! One of these connections was Paul Martin who shared photos and a letter which is featured in the article starting on page 5.

Something we look forward to each spring are the kids we get to connect with through museum field trips. We look forward to welcoming students from Litchfield, Dassel-Cokato, Kingston, and more. Recently, we had a group of high school students from St. Cloud tour the museum, and we also made a visit to the Litchfield 8th graders as they created virtual exhibits about the Holocaust. Homeschool groups, adult tours, and more are also available. Give us a call or email.

Memorial Day is a big deal at the Museum and G.A.R. Hall. We invite you celebrate with us at the annual Memorial Day Picnic on Monday, May 26 at the Litchfield Opera House. Lunch will be served from 11:00-1:30 and all proceeds go directly to the Museum and G.A.R. Hall.

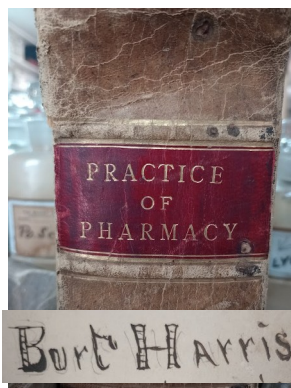
If you, your family, or your business are interested in sponsoring this annual tradition, please get in touch.



Collection Spotlight

In the Museum archives are many books on many topics, including some interesting medical books.

In the museum's pharmacy display with its equipment and medicine bottles are a few

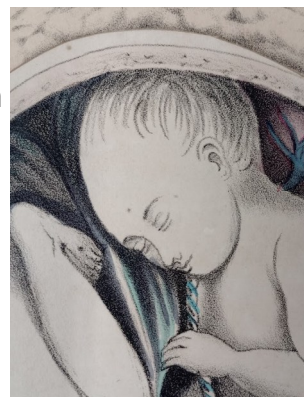


pharmacology books including *Practice of Pharmacy*. This 1888 book belonged to Burt Harris. His father was Virgil Harris who owned Harris Drug in Litchfield. Burt studied pharmacology and latter moved to North Dakota to work in that field. Inside the front and back cover, Burt

wrote his name several times, trying out several styles of writing. He also "filed" notes and clippings from other books among its pages, and there is a questionable stain that makes one wonder if there was a medicinal mishap. Sadly, Burt died in 1894 from typhoid at the age of 24.

Perhaps one of our most colorful and detailed medical books once belonged to Dr. Vincent P Kennedy. Kennedy's medical career began in the 1850s and continued into the Civil War and beyond. He came and went from Litchfield, living in other places including Amarillo, Texas the same time as the Martin Family (see page 5).

One of Kennedy's books is on obstetrics and midwifery from 1850. Much like modern children's picture books, the medical text has illustrations with flaps to lift and reveal more pictures. In this case, it was to see the changes of pregnancy and birth. This book would have been very innovative at the time.



Twins, in utero



New* and Returning Members January –March 2025

Dennis and Colleen Compton
William Holmquist
Margaret Johnson
Kim Kucera*
Greg and Karen Langmo*
Lois Sosenheimer
Jessica VanLanduyt
VFW Post 2818

Financial Donations January –March 2025

Cedar Mills Township	Litchfield Lions Club
Ellsworth Township	Meeker County
Forest City Township	MN Department of Ladies
Margaret Johnson	of the G.A.R.
Jerome Johnson	MNHS
Kingston Lions Club	Lois Sosenheimer
Kim Kucera	Jessica VanLanduyt
Ladies of the G.A.R.	VFW Post 2818
Daggett Circle	Shirley Vivion
Greg and Karen Langmo	Chris Wendroth
Don and Connie Lies	

Business and Nonprofit Members



American Legion Post 104



Conway, Deuth & Schiesing, PLLP

Litchfield
Downtown
Council



Litchfield Opera House



Litchfield Rotary



VFW Post 2818

Stockmen's
GREENHOUSE & GARDEN CENTER

Artifact Donations January-March 2025

Susan Barrick
Chuck Carlson
Nancy Delcomyn
Cliff Johnson
Steve Kess
Charles McCamy
Meeker County Courthouse
Meeker County Sheriff Department
Meeker FSA Office
Robyn Richardson
Doris Woods

Help share local history!

- Bring someone to the museum
- Forward our monthly email or share your newsletter with someone
- Organize a group tour or talk to us about group presentations
- Comment on and share our Facebook posts

Litchfield, Minn., March 19, 1889

Unable to Fly to Them

1889 Letter from Nathan C Martin

Opening lines to a letter from Nathan C Martin to his sister Bell, 1889

Few artifacts bring us more insight into the people of the past than personal letters, and the Museum has many letters in its archives. This issue of *Meeker Memories* is the start of a new series featuring letters. Words in italics are direct quotes.

Recently, a descendant of Nathan Clay Martin sent us a copy of an emotional letter written by Nathan, his great-grandfather. It was written on March 19, 1889 to his sister Isabel.

Nathan C Martin was born in Ohio in 1843. He enlisted in the Union Army in June 1862 and was a member of two Ohio regiments. After the war, Nathan moved to Indiana where he farmed for a time before taking up the law. In 1872, he established a newspaper in Indiana and the following year he married Clara Ward. The couple moved to Litchfield in August 1873 and started their family.

She was one of the most loving, unselfish, and devoted of wives and mothers. We have lived so happily together, and it seemed as the years went by we grew more and more together. She was always glad to share in my troubles and to lend a cheerful hand in everything. She seemed to have no thought for her own self or wishes but only for me and the children.

In Litchfield, Nathan worked in real estate and law. He was also



Clara Ward Martin



Nathan C Martin wearing his G.A.R. Hat and badge.

part owner and editor of the *Litchfield Independent* for a short time. In 1877, he was elected judge of probate, a position he held for multiple terms. Nathan was an early member of the Frank Daggett G.A.R. Post and served as its commander for several terms.

As for Clara, we can imagine she was busy with their seven children and was also a member of the Woman's Relief Corps, the auxiliary to the G.A.R.

By 1889, the family was planning to move to Texas. *I had been contemplating a trip to northern Texas during the latter part of the winter, and we both thought we could better our condition in several ways by going there.*

Plans were made for Nathan to travel to Texas so he could make arrangements for the family to relocate. However, about a week before he was set to leave, Clara suffered a miscarriage. They discussed if Nathan should still travel south. They doctor believed all was well and *Clara was anxious also for me to go in as much as it would interfere with plans down there which have been arranged.*

At some point along his route to Texas, Nathan received word that Clara hadn't been well

for a while, but she *thought it best not to telegraph me as it would be needless expense to call me back unless her sickness became dangerous.* He decided to pause his travels in Vernon, Texas when he received a telegraph to *come home immediately.*

Word reached Nathan while he was in Oklahoma heading north that Clara was beyond medical help. *I was miles from home, and somehow, I felt that I would never see her alive anymore. Oh! What a long distance it seemed. How slow the cars travelled, and with no one to console with, or comfort me, and no place nor opportunity to give vent to my pent up feelings.*

Nathan telegraphed Clara a farewell message which she received at 2:00 on the afternoon of March 13. *She was fully conscious at that time and died about 9:20 in the evening happy with a pleasant smile on her countenance.* Nathan arrived in Litchfield at 10:38 that evening.

Doctors Bissell and Kennedy had attended to Clara in her final days. One doctor believed her cause of death was blood poisoning while the other thought it was maybe a type of skin infection. *She had the best medical attendance, and everything was done by the neighbors & friends that could have been done. Yet I would have given the world to have been at her side.*

The funeral was largely attended, and we have the sympathy of all in our sad affliction. The day of the funeral was *the worst & most cloudy & gloomy weather I ever experienced. It seemed the very elements combined to add to the darkness & gloom that encompassed me.* A Litchfield newspaper considered Clara's death to be "among the saddest in the history of Litchfield."

As Nathan's letter continues, his mind turns to more practical matters. *I do not know what I shall do.* Should the family move to Texas as planned? Perhaps he could hire someone to help with the washing and cooking. He also pleads with his sister to come and stay a while. *We will try to get along day to day as long as we can.*

As to their children, Clara had *taught them to do a good many things,* but Nathan felt especially bad for their youngest child, only twenty months old. *He will scarcely ever be able to realize he ever had a mother.* And four-year-old Nathan Finley *thought Mamma was asleep.* *After the funeral that evening and the next*

morning he went into the room where she lay and could not find her. He says "Mamma gone" "Where Mamma." In a sad coincidence, both Nathan and Clara lost parents when they were six years old, not much older than Finley. Nathan's parents died within a few months of each other and Clara's father was killed in action during the Civil War.

Nathan began to close his letter to his sister when he was once again drawn into to sorrow he was feeling. *The thought that my dear wife was calling for me, and longing for my presence, the anguish of the children, the parting, and me the husband and father away and unable to fly to them, you can imagine to some extent the agony of the journey home.*

Life did go on for the Martin family. They soon moved to the Texas Panhandle. There, Nathan made a name for himself as a newspaperman and is also considered the founder of the Forest Hill area of Amarillo. When he died in 1917, even having been gone from Litchfield for over 25 years, he was remembered in the local paper and honored at Litchfield's G.A.R. Post.



Nathan C Martin in Texas

Throughout his letter, Nathan mentions his religious beliefs, drawing strength from his faith. One can imagine his joy upon reaching heaven and once again seeing Clara *where I telegraphed her I would meet her.*

A special thanks to Paul Martin for sharing more of his family's history with us at the Museum and G.A.R. Hall, including a copy of the letter and some of the photos seen here.

Civil War Tour of the Minnesota State Capitol

Saturday, April 26 at 10:00 am

Special group tour organized
by the Meeker County Museum

Purchase online or at the Museum

\$15 ~ Ticket deadline is April 9

Curious about carpooling? Let us know.

GENEALOGY HOUR

1st Thursday of the month
5:30 p.m.

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall



Meeker County Museum
at the G.A.R. Hall
Sharing Our Stories Since 1985

Visit our website or
Facebook page for details.
MeekerCoMuseum.org

Meeker Memos

Monthly email



Each month, we will send you a short and to-the-point email with the latest news and events from the Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall.

To signup, just send an email with subject "email signup" to Director@meekercomuseum.org

History Blog

Learn more about Meeker County
history with our blog
Meekercomuseum.org/blog

THANK YOU to the Greater Litchfield
Opera House Association and their
in-kind donation of printing this
publication.

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall Membership

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number: _____

Email _____

Annual Museum Membership

- ☐ Single \$25
- ☐ Family \$40
- ☐ Senior Single \$20
- ☐ Senior Family \$35

Annual Litchfield Civil War Roundtable Membership

- ☐ Single \$30
- ☐ Family \$40

☐ I'd like to make an additional donation \$ _____

Membership Matters!

Your membership to the Meeker County Museum not only gives you some great benefits, including free/reduced admission and a subscription to *Meeker Memories*, but you are also supporting the ongoing work at the Museum. **Thank you!**

Members can find your renewal date on your mailing label.

Meeker County Historical Society, 308 N Marshall Avenue, Litchfield, MN 55355

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall
308 North Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 2
Litchfield, MN
55355